

## **A Complete Identity: The Construct of the Youthful Hero in the work of G.A. Henty and George MacDonald**

### **Abstract**

The following article is an examination of the hero figure in the work of G.A. Henty (1832-1902) and George MacDonald (1824-1905) in order to reassess the current critique of their writing as oppositional and to demonstrate that their work reflects some foundational preoccupations of the period in which they wrote. The central hypothesis is that the complementary characteristics of the hero figure found in both of these writers constructs a complete identity commensurate with the ideal Victorian hero.

### **Introduction**

The fusion of the physical and the spiritual is a key to the hero figure in both Henty and MacDonald. Henty emphasises the physical attributes of the hero figure and includes significant spiritual aspects. In MacDonald's work, the emphasis is on spiritual attributes and development but his heroes display the same physical abilities as Henty. The hero in the work of both writers displays both characteristics and his construct reflects preoccupations found within the historical period in which they wrote, that is, the second half of the nineteenth-century. The physical and spiritual characteristics meet in the construct of the 'Victorian' hero who, as an ideal, is in the realm of the imagined. This constructed hero occupies, 'the space of fantasy' (Marshall, 2002: 1212). From 'the space of fantasy', the hero is positioned to occupy both physical and psychological spaces represented as exotic (imperial), domestic (political) and internal (psychological) landscapes.

### **The Hero-Figure as Exemplar in G.A. Henty and George MacDonald**

The hero, as theorised by Thomas Carlyle, was a dominant influence on the nineteenth century English mindset but the constructs of the heroes he presents are drawn from wider, if mainly western, sources. His lecture series On Heroes and Hero Worship fuelled the propensity of the Victorians to focus their need for stability on both historical and contemporary figures whom they could elevate to ideals. This anticipated emulation was a motivating factor for Henty in writing his historical stories. Since the term 'Victorian' is used to portray a number of undefined

characteristics so the term 'Victorian hero' is popularly understood to portray a character or concept. It is simplistic, but it is a starting point for discussion.

In the preface to Condemned as a Nihilist (1893) Henty writes,

There are few difficulties that cannot be surmounted by patience, resolution and pluck (Henty, 1893: Preface)

and in Sturdy and Strong (1888),

for success in life it is necessary not only to be earnest, steadfast, and true, but to have the faculty of turning every opportunity to the best advantage; ... If similar qualities and similar determination are yours, you need not despair of similar success in life (Henty, n.d.-b: 3,iv).

The heroes of these stories demonstrate such qualities. Thus Henty's emphasis on and encouragement of identification with the hero figure is embedded in his historical context and the need of Victorian society for hero figures.<sup>i</sup> In the majority of Henty's stories, the hero holds a prominent position within the text and demonstrates subjectivity and agency in that he is both acted upon and acts. In the initial chapters of those stories critiqued as 'typically' Henty<sup>ii</sup>, by, for example Guy Arnold (1980), Patrick Dunne (1975) Martin Green (1980), Marjorie Hourihan (1997), Robert Huttenback (1965) and Hugh Walpole (1926), the hero is constructed as 'subject' by circumstances outside of his control but which place him in the position of agent in which his own choice of action dictates his subsequent progress. This narratological pattern fits that of both the adventure and the fairy tale hero.

George MacDonald is less explicit in his purpose to provide a protagonist for emulation, but everything he wrote depicted the journey of a person or persons towards maturity. Although MacDonald 'said nothing of *mission* nor of *message*' (MacDonald, 1989: 23), his second son Ronald MacDonald cites his awareness that,

having been driven ... to give up the professional pulpit, he was no less impelled than compelled to use unceasingly the new platform whence he had found his voice could carry so far (MacDonald, 1989: 33).

This educative intention applied equally to his adult and to his children's writing. In MacDonald's work the emphasis is on the development of a character and his aim is to encourage a movement towards goodness in terms of spiritual awareness which affects action and attitude towards other people.

Both Henty and MacDonald regarded experience as a better educator than book learning in the moulding of character as noted by Rod McGillis in his discussion of The Princess and Curdie (1883) (1985: 157). Henty frequently emphasises the superiority of experience over study in the development of his protagonist's character<sup>iii</sup>.

The Henty hero begins his story from a morally advantaged position. His early upbringing always includes at least one parent or other significant adult who teaches him to 'act right and straight and honourable ... to be a good man and a gentleman ....' (n.d: 33). Examples of such education can be found in the single parent upbringing of Dick Holland, hero of The Tiger of Mysore (1896) and in the assumption of a foster parent role by the gatekeeper's wife, for William Gale, in For Name and Fame: or to Cabul with Roberts (1886). Both Henty and MacDonald consciously construct heroes from a Christian moral base, heroes who provided leadership within their social context from a 'moral' perspective. I use the word moral as defined by Geoffrey Galt Harpham, as

some rule that overrides the confusion of customs, habits, norms,  
some principle that legitimates action even in the absence of clear  
rules or unanimous consensus (Harpham, 1999: 259).

Harpham continues, 'without morality, one could never be a hero, just a dissenter, a loner, and oddball' (Harpham, 1999: 259). Harpham's observation places the hero figure within his societal norm but also encompasses the Carlylean concept of the leader as 'set apart' in his ability to act from a position of principle even when it is not in step with the prevailing norm. The perceived innate superiority of the hero figure reflects the Victorian need for morally upright heroes to emulate as demonstrated by the influences discussed in the next section.

### **Influences on the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Construct of the Hero**

The main characteristics of the Victorian hero are encapsulated by Charles Kingsley in the preface to his novel Westward Ho! (1855). He offers a story in which he aims to present,

That type of English virtue, at once manful and godly, practical and  
enthusiastic, prudent and self-sacrificing, (Kingsley, n.d)

which, he believes, these men embody. Kingsley links these qualities to the Elizabethan worthies in whose time his story is set, but Kingsley's character is a

Victorian construct drawn from a wider range of sources. The ideal Victorian hero is examined below through the investigation of five categories of hero; classical, active, adventure, fairy tale and flawed. I have chosen these categories for the following reasons: the categories of classical, active, adventure and fairy tale represent constructs from history and literature that influenced the Victorian construct of the hero. The category of flawed hero is investigated because this construct is not expected in the hero figure of the nineteenth century boy's adventure story and therefore exemplifies another instance where both authors represent a hero with the same characteristic. I have not included an investigation of the gendered hero in this article since such an examination requires a separate discussion.<sup>iv</sup> The hero as victim and outsider is not prominent in Henty's stories, although MacDonald's Diamond in At the Back of the North Wind (1871) and Claire Skymer in A Rough Shaking (1893) partially demonstrate this character's position.

### ***The Classical Hero***

In Alasdair MacIntyre's discussion of Aristotelian ethics, he notes that in classical, heroic societies, morality and the social structure cannot be divided (MacIntyre, 1984: 123). Likewise there is no discrimination between the social and the political, so the heroic is inextricably linked with activity in the public sphere of life, that is, how a person lives in society. According to MacIntyre, the foundation of all other virtues in this context is courage. Linked to courage are reliability, faithfulness, honesty, friendship, self restraint, wisdom and justice, without which the fifth century Greeks believed public order could not be sustained (MacIntyre, 1984: 123). Both Henty and MacDonald emphasise the need for courage in any situation, whether the martial or the public sphere of life. Harvey S. Ford notes, 'Courage was (Henty's) keynote' (1941: 269), as he quotes Henty's assertion,

that if not in itself the very highest of virtues, courage is the parent of almost all the others, since but a few of them can be practiced without it (Ford, 1941: 269).

Henty's heroes demonstrate activity in the public sphere Frank Hargate in By Sheer Pluck (1884), having made his fortune, still chooses to take his place in society as a doctor, and, 'He worked hard and steadily and passed with high honours' (Henty, n.d.-a: 352). Other heroes, such as Percy Groves (Through the Sikh War, 1894), take their place in parliament.

MacDonald regarded courage as essentially a moral virtue. He discusses the demonstration of moral courage in his short story The Broken Swords (1854) and in the final paragraph of Phantastes (1858), his first adult fantasy, MacDonald relates the virtue of courage to simplicity and to the spirituality of belief.

Yet I know that good is coming to me – that good is always coming;  
though few have at all times the simplicity and the courage to believe it  
(MacDonald, 1994: 320).

Physical strength is a familiar component of the Henty hero and is part of Kingsley's construct of the muscular Christian, a construct which MacDonald extends to include what John Pennington terms 'muscular spirituality', (Pennington, 1994). Thus in MacDonald's The Princess and Curdie (1883) Curdie displays the same characteristics as found in the Henty hero, in terms of leadership, courage, initiative and physical strength but MacDonald's emphasis is on Curdie's spiritual development. The foregrounding of the hero's behaviour as revealing his values, demonstrates the intention of both writers to be influential as, 'they shape, in their reader, certain evaluative judgements' (Nussbaum, 1998: 353).

A facet of character lacking in the classical hero, but present in the Victorian hero, is captured succinctly by D.A. Russell when he states that the Homeric hero is not 'an officer and a gentleman' (Russell, 1982: 25).

### ***The Active hero***

In this category I will examine briefly the most stereotypical hero, that of the active hero. In her study Deconstructing the Hero (1997), Margery Hourihan observes that the hero is above all things, 'a man of action'. Hourihan cites the active hero as representative of, 'the intrepid British lad' found in the 'flood of adventure stories' produced by 'the age of imperialism' (Hourihan, 1997: 2-3). Henty's stories are often critically perceived<sup>v</sup> as prime contributions to this 'flood'. Hourihan associates the active hero (always male) exclusively with the glorification of violence as the definition of manhood. The active hero may be the most clearly analogous with the simplistic 'Victorian hero' as depicted by Michael Brander in his biography of Samuel White Baker, Victorian explorer, but the term 'Victorian hero' is too superficial a description since the Victorians, although pre-occupied with heroism,

held a variety of views. The composite construct of the Victorian hero renders him more complex than Hourihan's description allows. The active hero of the Henty story includes the concepts of the muscular Christian, the Arnoldian boy, the English gentleman, everyman, and the leader of men. Masculinity, as advocated by F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley in the form of 'muscular Christianity,' promoted physical exercise, 'as a means of bodily purification and practical Christianity' (Hignell, 2002: 49) thus including a spiritual dimension. Kingsley advocated cricket on the basis that it encouraged respect, discipline and obedience to rules, but the Henty hero, although a competent games player as demonstrated by Frank Hargate in By Sheer Pluck (1884), showed his physical dominance when necessary, through the skill of boxing, an individual sport. MacDonald recognised the importance of physical fitness and Ronald MacDonald notes MacDonald's personal competence as a boxer, 'he was fond of boxing, a very quick hitter and clever with the gloves' (MacDonald, 1989: 40). Ronald MacDonald's sentence reads like a description by Henty of one of his own heroes, for example, '... boxing gives quickness of thought, and doubtless improves the pose and figure' (Henty, 1906: 12).

There is some discrepancy between the active 'Victorian' hero and the muscular Christian games player which needs clarification at this point, in relation to the construct of the Arnoldian boy, since the 'Victorian' hero is noted for his initiative and independence of thought rather than his homogeneity. The concept of the Arnoldian<sup>vi</sup> boy is recognisably present in the Henty hero. He demonstrates 'manly virtues' not only in terms of physical prowess but also by his truthfulness and unselfishness (Henty, 1903a: 54). These two characteristics are always present in the persona of the Henty hero and are found in, for example, Frank Hargate of By Sheer Pluck (1884), and whose integrity and selflessness were unquestioned.<sup>vii</sup>

However, in the ethos of the Public School, the Arnoldian boy was trained to act in a team situation, to obey the team captain and present a united front. The embryonic hero present in the ideal Arnoldian team player was the character accused by Luigi Barzini of operating by a limited set of fixed ideas, inculcated by his schooling and from which he did not have the imagination to deviate (Barzini, 1983: 53-54). This limited character does not correlate with the fundamental resourcefulness and the ability to act on his own initiative found in the Henty hero. The characteristics emphasised in this context are those of individualism, leadership in the sense of acting decisively on one's own initiative, and the ability to behave

calmly in dangerous situations. He cannot be easily categorised because, as Guy Arnold comments, 'he is an ideal' (Arnold, 1980: 41). Henty's stated intention was to create a boy hero who could be 'everyman' as well as the 'conspicuous leader' cited by Niemeyer as integral to Carlyle's construct. (Carlyle, 1966: xi).

In MacDonald's heroes, such as Curdie, and Richard, the protagonist of 'Cross Purposes' (1862), the characteristics of intellectual and moral superiority are emphasised. Both of them originate from a lower social class although they display the 'middle class' characteristic of 'polite manners', noted by Hourihan. MacDonald's emphasis on the process of individual spiritual and moral development is aptly described by John Pennington as 'muscular spirituality', a theory, Pennington argues, developed in MacDonald's fiction in response to Darwinian theory and as an extension to the muscular Christian activism advocated by Maurice and Kingsley. MacDonald's emphasis on the need for inner, spiritual strength in order to undertake and fulfil one's journey and 'adventure' is demonstrated in all of his work, and is clearly exemplified in the Princess books in which Curdie conquers his inner wilderness of disbelief in Irene's Grandmother and gains the ability to discern the positions of other people on the evolutionary ladder of spiritual progress. MacDonald's emphasis on the spiritual and Henty's emphasis on the physical character development does not mean that these traits are mutually exclusive. Both physical and spiritual characteristics are present in the protagonists of both authors. The 'two realms' critiqued as parallel in the writing of MacDonald (Prickett, 1983: 2) are integral to the Victorian historical context. The spiritual dimension, encompassing the unconscious mind, the irrational or inexplicable in empiricist terms, and the providential in terms of fictional coincidence, is 'the world of the heroic' (Levine, 1982: 64). Both authors provide heroes that, put together, create the longed-for ideal hero of Victorian aspiration, the physical complemented by the spiritual and vice versa.

The attributes of the culturally constructed 'Victorian' boy hero, such as courage, truthfulness, support for the weak, and physical strength are however also present in MacDonald's Ranald in Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood (1871) and can be illustrated by specific episodes in the story which I will examine in more depth in order to demonstrate the development of characteristics paralleled in and associated with the Henty boy rather than the MacDonald child, by critics already cited.

Even as a young child, Ranald displays resourcefulness and daring against a background of peer conformity as his escape from Dame Shand's school attests. At the age of six, he recalls,

I found myself led by the ungentle hand of Mrs. Mitchell (the housekeeper) towards a little school on the outside of the village ... Mrs Mitchell opened the door and led me in. It was an awful experience (1871: 33-34).

There follows a description of Dame Shand's school, the room, the other children and the dog, which is guarding a child tied to the table leg. Ranald resolves to escape. The account continues, 'And I soon had my first experience of how those are helped who will help themselves' (1871: 36), a direct Smilesian precept. Ranald runs away but faces an even greater difficulty than escape when he is pursued by the dog,

For one moment I felt as if I should sink to the earth for sheer terror. The next moment a wholesome rage sent the blood to my brain. From abject cowardice to wild attack ... was the change of an instant (1871: 38).

Ranald attacks the dog, and escapes. Reflecting on this episode, he refers to the action as prompted by 'rage'; with the observation, 'I cannot call it courage' (1871: 38). The discussion of the flawed hero and the nature of courage contain a reference to an incident in Henty's Rujub the Juggler (1895), in which the hero, Ralph Bathurst, analyses his behaviour as the result of rage in a reflection similar to that of Ranald. Ranald faced the danger and escaped, whilst the other children remain tyrannised by Dame Shand. His resourcefulness, a key quality in the active hero, continues as he finds a hiding place. The next day, Ranald's father steps in to prevent his being taken back to the school. At this point in the story a character is introduced with whom Ranald has most of his remaining boyhood adventures and who, apart from his origin, fits the mould of the 'Victorian' hero not only as a boy, but also as a man by becoming a 'well-known' General (1871: 335). Turkey, the herd boy, is 'a hero' (1871: 66) to Ranald and his two younger brothers. Apart from his ability to control cattle, including bulls, Turkey knows everything about the natural world and in this respect closely resembles Dickon from Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden (1911). Ranald recalls, 'Short of flying, we believed him capable of everything imaginable' (1871: 67). Turkey is also portrayed as 'real boy', but is not



represented as having the faults depicted in Ranald; thus his character presents a blending of the real and the ideal such as is found in Henty's stories. Turkey's impoverished position as a fatherless cow herd, and his care for those around him, also qualify him as fairy tale hero, whilst his soldierly accomplishments demonstrate the characteristics of the classical hero. His qualities of leadership, resourcefulness and courage are typical of the active hero and are displayed to the full in the episode involving Wandering Willie. Wandering Willie is described as; a 'half-witted' person 'commonly styled Foolish Willie. His approach is announced by a wailful strain upon the bagpipes ...,' His figure engenders both fascination and fear in the children and is used as a threat by the housekeeper, who maintains that if Ranald and his brothers do not behave, 'she would give this one or that one to Foolish Willie to take away with him.' Although this never happens, 'One day, in early summer ... wee Davie disappeared' (Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood 100,02,03). Ranald soon discovers that Willie has carried him off and whilst the adults are debating what to do, he runs straight to Turkey, who, Ranald felt sure, would know how to rescue Davie. The result was that,

[Turkey] set off at a swinging trot in the direction of a little rocky knoll in a hollow .... which he knew to be a favourite haunt of Wandering Willie (1871: 104).

Willie is there, with Davie, but it takes all Turkey's resourcefulness and coolness to retrieve Davie. Willie is strong, unpredictable and beyond reason. Turkey manages to steal his pipes while Ranald rescues Davie. (1871: 104,108,101,110). The details of this adventure demonstrate Turkey's finely balanced timing in the execution of his tactics to achieve the rescue in what is a genuinely dangerous situation. Ranald of course plays a major role in Davie's rescue, but without Turkey's strategy it could never have been achieved.

In his novel Sir Gibbie (1879), MacDonald defends his depiction of ideal characters against what he perceives as the demand for, 'the representation of that grade of humanity of which men see the most' (1991: 43), when he writes,

whatever the demand of the age, I insist that that which *ought* to be presented to its beholding, is the common good uncommonly developed, and that not because of its rarity, but because it is truer to humanity. ... It is the noble, not the failure from the noble, that is the true human (1991: 43).

In this passage, MacDonald's position on character representation echoes that of Carlyle's description of everyman as hero and reflects the aspirational ideals found in the Comtean New Calendar of Great Men (1892).

As Ranald matures, episodes such as the rescue of Davie extend to incorporate that element of spiritual growth so integral to MacDonald's work. The inclusion of failure, in the chapter 'I Go Down Hill' is paralleled by Curdie's experience in The Princess and Curdie (1883) when, as Curdie grew older, 'he was gradually changing into a commonplace man' (1993: 22). Realisation of his degeneration comes to Ranald, as it does to Curdie, in a crisis precipitated by his own destructive action, at which point, he is able to initiate the process of growth and renewal.

Just as in Henty's historical stories, Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood allows 'the reality of the facts to yield sometimes to the idea which each of them must represent in the eyes of posterity' (Lukacs, 1962: 76). Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood is a subjective account, focalised predominantly through Ranald. Thus Ranald Bannerman is presented by MacDonald as a 'real' boy, although he is portrayed with intimations of the ideal that are more fully developed in works such as At the Back of the North Wind (1871), published in the same year, The Princess and the Goblin (1872), The Princess and Curdie (1883) and the adult novel Robert Falconer (1868). The progress of Ranald Bannerman demonstrates the development of characteristics paralleled in and associated with the Henty boy.

Incorporating the classical virtues of courage and honour and combining the active virtues of physical fitness with the muscular Christian virtues of truthfulness and unselfishness, the 'Victorian' hero is building into a more complex character than the stereotypical construct can accommodate.

### ***The Adventure hero***

The category of 'adventure hero' is based on Mikhail Bakhtin's critique of the adventure hero. Bakhtin describes the hero of adventure as one who reacts in the correct way to further his fortunes when the opportunity arises (1981: 116). He specialises in being in the right place at the right time. This opportunity is not just a matter of coincidence, action has to be taken. Examples of such an opportune coincidence can be found in Henty's work By Sheer Pluck (1884) and in MacDonald's A Rough Shaking (1891). The second characteristic of the adventure

hero according to Bakhtin is that he is not significantly changed by his experiences. The Henty hero displays the same virtues before his adventure as he displays at the culmination of the story. The majority of Henty's stories end as the hero approaches maturity and returns to England after his adventure, although there are exceptions such as Young Buglers (1880) and The Young Franc-Tireurs (1872). In most of the stories the hero has gained experience and expertise through his adventures, but his character, although strengthened, is essentially the same. His character has matured rather than changed. MacDonald's Clare Skymer in A Rough Shaking (1891) also demonstrates an essentially unchanged character. The MacDonaldian emphasis on spiritual and emotional stamina constructs him as an ideal of goodness rather than an ideal of the English boy character, whose physical stamina is emphasised by Henty. (Clare, however, also possesses physical strength and stamina). The physical and the spiritual ideal can be envisaged as two characters facing each other at opposite ends of a continuum. The same physical and spiritual characteristics exist in both but with a change in emphasis. Thus, in the work of MacDonald, Randal Bannerman can be correlated with the Henty hero in terms of his growing capacity for initiative, action and leadership. His story typifies linear time and a mimetic approach to literature, characteristics associated with 'realistic fiction'<sup>viii</sup>, however the blending of realism and fantasy in both Henty and MacDonald evidences non-mimesis in its depiction of the progress toward maturation, a progress in which cyclical or 'mythic' time and linear time intersect one another (Nikolajeva, 2000: 1). To continue my diagrammatic explanation of the hero's progress along a continuum, MacDonald's Clare Skymer, (A Rough Shaking (1893)) includes the essential elements of the Henty hero in terms of perseverance, survival skills, honesty and integrity, but displays the 'other worldly' goodness of Diamond from At the Back of the North Wind (1871), which places him in the position of the hero as victim and as an example of the character of the holy fool whose goodness renders him unfit for the real world. The references to Clare's adult life, however, belie this perceived unfitness, as the story of his childhood stops with the implication that he will become the captain of an English gunboat, following in the footsteps of his father. This position of leadership in a masculine profession places him on the same level of operation as Nat Glover who serves as Commander of an English frigate in Henty's A Roving Commission (1900).

### ***The Fairy Tale Hero***

Lastly, there is one category of hero typically associated with the work of MacDonald but not frequently with the work of Henty, that is, the fairy tale hero. However, this character is clearly present in the work of Henty and his progress follows the same narratological path as the traditional fairy tale hero, that is, quest/journey struggle/test success/achievement triumph/homecoming (Propp, 1968: 37-39, 50). In traditional tales, the fairy tale hero is often found in the persona of the youngest or only son, a character described by Max Lüthi as, 'one of the true folk tale heroes' (Luthi, 1982: 65), and viewed as one of the disadvantaged. He is often an orphan or at least has lost his father and his inheritance. The youngest or only son operates in the fairy tale world in which, as Maria Tatar states, 'compassion counts' (Tatar, 1992: 79). He is characterised by unselfishness and a desire to help in response to immediate need and is not motivated by the expectation of a reward, although his actions usually result in good fortune. Examples from Henty can be found in With Kitchener in the Soudan (1903) and Captain Bayley's Heir (1889). Although the Henty hero rarely falls into the category of the ridiculed and despised in the same way that the fairy tale hero in both traditional and literary tales does, he demonstrates enough elements of the fairy tale hero in his circumstances and behaviour for this category to be included in his construct.

The heroes of MacDonald's fairy tales noted above, Richard ('Cross Purposes', 1862) Curdie and Irene (The 'Princess' books, 1872 and 1883) are essential to MacDonald's critique of society. Curdie and Irene are engaged in a battle against self-interested materialism in The Princess and Curdie (1883) and Richard is instrumental in foregrounding the seemingly insurmountable barriers of social class. Both stories illustrate the role of the fairy tale hero as, 'rectifying principle' (Rohrich, 1991: 209). The failure of Richard to cross the social divide despite his demonstration of heroic qualities in fairyland indicates a failure of the initial subversion of cultural norms by the retention of the status quo and is an example of, 'pessimism ... about the possibilities of subversion, viewing resistance as ultimately always contained' (Rice and Waugh, 2001: 254). MacDonald's hero Gilbert Galbraith, from the novel Sir Gibbie (1879) provides a connection between the fairy tale hero and the gentleman, with connotations of the chivalry and devotion of the medieval warrior saint, resulting in the combination of a parochial 'Miles Christianus', Victorian waif and the fairy tale hero who finds his fortune. He

maintains the 'tone of positive hopefulness' (Haughton, 1973: 153) which is found in the fairy tale hero and which takes him beyond the immediacy of a hope for personal wealth and comfort (the reward of Henty heroes and an outcome that Sir Gibbie also experiences) to a hope for the restoration of the whole community. The characteristics of the fairy tale hero do not displace the characteristics found in the earlier categories; rather they are present in addition to those previously examined.

### ***The Flawed Hero***

The final category is that of the flawed hero, included for two reasons. The first is that it is unexpected to find a flawed hero in Henty if existing critiques of his hero figure are accepted and the second is the similar description of Henty's flawed hero to that of MacDonald's in 'The Broken Swords' (1854).

In Carlyle's second lecture ('The Hero as Prophet', 1840) he states, 'Is not a man's walking, in truth, always 'a succession of falls?' (Carlyle, 1966: 47). Carlyle's exposition follows in terms of how the hero reacts to his 'falls', which Carlyle views as necessary to the hero's 'struggle ... onwards' (Carlyle, 1966: 47). More recently, Erica Jong writes, 'a hero must be imperfect or how can she be tested?' (Jong, 2004: 144). Thus the concept of the hero as everyman is reinforced, as is demonstrated by the unexpected appearance of an explicitly imperfect 'Victorian' hero in Henty's Rujub the Juggler (1893) and in the protagonist of MacDonald's short story 'The Broken Swords' (1854). Both authors emphasise moral courage rather than purely physical courage, but the rehabilitation of both protagonists, portrayed as flawed heroes, is by their overcoming their fear in the face of battle. Henty's discussion of the distinction between moral and physical courage in Rujub the Juggler is closer to MacDonald's emphasis on moral and spiritual courage than to the stereotyped figure of the Henty, and by implication the 'Victorian,' active hero.

The concept of the flawed hero connects not only with the possibility of identification with the hero, thus easing the process of emulation, but also with the Victorian acceptance of the hero in defeat, eulogised in Tennyson's poem 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (1855) which turned the disastrous charge of the Light Brigade at the battle of Balaclava during the Crimean war into a legend, despite the catalogue of incompetence and misunderstanding that led to the soldiers' annihilation. The emphasis on sacrifice brings together the heroic characteristics from the previous categories.

## Conclusion

Thus, from the five categories cited above, the composite character displays the following major characteristics: from the classical hero, courage and honour are the most prominent traits. The character of the active hero builds on the classical to incorporate initiative, courage, coolness in the face of danger, intelligence (but not cleverness), patriotism (but not nationalism), sincerity and integrity. The adventure hero adds the ability to seize opportunities fortuitously encountered to the characteristics of the classical and the active hero. He also displays maturation in his development of character but without significant change. Finally, the fairy tale hero demonstrates compassion, self-sacrifice and disinterested action as his defining characteristics. All the above characteristics have been discussed in the context of the flawed hero which demonstrates facets of the hero figure linking him to 'everyman.'

The figure of the ideal hero constructed out of the political and cultural milieu in the second half of the nineteenth century embraced both the real and the imagined. He grew out of a need for stability in a period of unprecedented change at home and unprecedented expansion of English influence abroad and his idealised character held implications in both spheres, the domestic and the exotic.

In this brief examination of the hero figure in the work of Henty and MacDonald I have demonstrated that the complementary characteristics of the physical and the spiritual are found in the hero figure constructed by both Henty and MacDonald and that together they create a complete identity commensurate with the construct of the ideal Victorian hero figure which reflects the mindset of an historical period in its activity both in the domestic and exotic spheres of England and the Empire. This construct can be traced beyond the Victorian era. A further study of the influence of such a construct on twentieth and twenty-first century English cultural identity would be beneficial to the current discussion on 'Britishness'.

## References

- Arnold, G. (1980) *Held Fast for England: G. A. Henty Imperialist Boy's Writer*, Hamish Hamilton, London.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, University of Texas Press, Austin.
- Barzini, L. (1983) *The Impossible Europeans*, Penguin, London.
- Carlyle, T. (1966) *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* edited with an introduction by Carl Niemeyer, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln/London.
- Carpenter, H. and Pritchard, M. (1984) *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Cavallaro, D. (2001) *Critical and Cultural Theory: Thematic Variations*, The Athlone Press, London.
- Fisher, M. (1986) *The Bright Face of Danger: an Exploration of the Adventure Story*, Hodder and Stoughton, London.
- Ford, H. S. (1941) *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 263-276.
- Harpham, G. G. (1999) *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society*, Duke University Press, Durham and London.
- Haughton, R. (1973) *Tales from Eternity: the World of Fairy and the Spiritual Search*, George Allen and Unwin, London.
- Henty, G. A. (1893) *Condemned as a Nihilist*, Blackie and Son Limited, London.
- Henty, G. A. (1903a) *The Home Messenger*, **XII**, 54-56.
- Henty, G. A. (1903b) *With Kitchener in the Soudan: a Story of Atbara and Omdurman*, Blackie and Son, London.
- Henty, G. A. (1906) *A Soldier's Daughter and Other Stories*, Blackie and Son, London.
- Henty, G. A. (n.d) *For Name and Fame: or to Cabul with Roberts*, Blackie and Son, London.
- Henty, G. A. (n.d.-a) *By Sheer Pluck*, Blackie and Son, Glasgow.
- Henty, G. A. (n.d.-b) *Sturdy and Strong: or How George Andrews made His Way*, Blackie and Son Limited, London.
- Hignell, A. (2002) *Rain Stops Play: Cricketing Climates*, Frank Cass, London.
- Hourihan, M. (1997) *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Johnson, Rachel E. "A Complete Identity: The Image of the Hero in the Work of G.A. Henty (1832-1902) and George Macdonald (1824-1905)." PhD. Coventry University in association with The University of Worcester, 2008., pp. 233.
- Jong, E. (2004) *Sappho's Leap*, Arcadia Books, London.
- Kingsley, C. (n.d) *Westward Ho!: or the Voyages and Adventures of Sir Amyas Leigh*, R. E. King & Co., London.
- Levine, G. L. (1982) In *Perspectives on Nineteenth Century Heroism: essays from the 1981 Conference of the Southeastern Nineteenth Century Studies Association* (Ed, Putzell, S. M. a. L., David C.) Jose Porrua Turanzas, S. A., Madrid, pp. 47-72.
- Lukacs, G. (1962) *The Historical Novel*, Merlin Press, London.
- Luthi, M. (1982) *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia.
- MacDonald, G. (1871) *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood*, Strahan and Co., London.
- MacDonald, G. (1991) *Sir Gibbie*, Johannesen, Whitethorn.
- MacDonald, G. (1993) *The Princess and Curdie*, Johannesen, Whitethorn, CA.
- MacDonald, G. (1994) *Phantastes*, Johannesen, Whitethorn.
- MacDonald, R. (1989) *From a Northern Window*, Sunrise Books, Eureka (CA).
- MacIntyre, A. (1984) *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame.

- Marshall, C. (2002) *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, **117**, 1207-1216.
- McGillis, R. (1985) In *Touchstones: Reflections on the Best in Children's Literature*, Vol. 1 (Ed, Nodelman, P.) Children's Literature Association, West Lafayette, pp. 142-162.
- Nikolajeva, M. (2000) *From Mythic to Linear*, Scarecrow, Lanham, MD.
- Nikolajeva, M. (2005) (Ed, Workshop, N. D.) Aland, pp. Lecture.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1998) *Philosophy and Literature*, **22**, 343-365.
- Pennington, J. (1994) In *Muscular Christianity* (Ed, Hall, D. E.) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Prickett, S. (1983) *North Wind: Journal of the George MacDonald Society.*, 14-23.
- Propp, V. (1968) *Morphology of the Folktale*, University of Texas Press, Austin.
- Rice, P. and Waugh, P. (Eds.) (2001) *Modern Literary Theory*, Arnold, London.
- Rohrich, L. (1991) *Folktales and Reality*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.
- Russell, D. A. (1982) *The Yearbook of English Studies*, **12**, 24-24.
- Tatar, M. (1992) *Off With Their Heads!: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

---

## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Maria Nikolajeva challenges the assumption that readers will identify with a character, usually the protagonist, in her lecture 'The Identification Fallacy: Perspective and Subjectivity in Children's Literature' (2005). Citing the 'literary-didactic split', Nikolajeva argues that readers who reject 'the fixed subject position imposed on them by the text' Nikolajeva, M. (2005) (Ed, Workshop, N. D.) Aland, pp. Lecture., display a higher degree of literary competence than those who unquestioningly identify with the protagonist. As a mature reader he is able to adopt a position that allows examination of the character rather than identification.
- <sup>ii</sup> 'Typically Henty' in the sense that they demonstrate the formulaic structure of the orphaned (or apparently orphaned) hero who travels to an exotic location to meet adventure and make his fortune. Examples include By Sheer Pluck, (1884) For Name and Fame (1886) and Through the Sikh War (1894).
- <sup>iii</sup> Examples can be found in Henty, G. A. (1893) *Condemned as a Nihilist*, Blackie and Son Limited, London. and Henty, G. A. (1903b) *With Kitchener in the Soudan: a Story of Atbara and Omdurman*, Blackie and Son, London.
- <sup>iv</sup> For a discussion of the gendered hero in the work of Henty and MacDonald see Johnson, R. E. (2008) In *Institute of Humanities and Creative Arts* Coventry University in association with The University of Worcester, Worcester, pp. 233.
- <sup>v</sup> For examples of critical assessment of Henty see Arnold, G. (1980) *Held Fast for England: G. A. Henty Imperialist Boy's Writer*, Hamish Hamilton, London, Carpenter, H. and Pritchard, M. (1984) *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, Fisher, M. (1986) *The Bright Face of Danger: an Exploration of the Adventure Story*, Hodder and Stoughton, London.
- <sup>vi</sup> In his discussion on ideology, Dani Cavallaro notes Louis Althusser's theory that the 'individual is transformed into a social being by ideology' Cavallaro, D. (2001) *Critical and Cultural Theory: Thematic Variations*, The Athlone Press, London., with particular reference to cultural institutions. In the nineteenth century, one of those institutions was the English public school system as developed by Thomas Arnold.



---

<sup>vii</sup> See for example the episode described in Henty, G. A. (n.d.-a) *By Sheer Pluck*, Blackie and Son, Glasgow.

<sup>viii</sup> See Nikolajeva, M. (2000) *From Mythic to Linear*, Scarecrow, Lanham, MD. for discussion of such generic distinctions.